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REJECTING SELF-DETERRENCE IN THE POST-COLD WAR ENVIRONMENT:
ASSUMING A LEADERSHIP ROLE TO INFLUENCE THE FUTURE

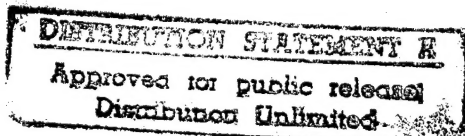
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Abstract of

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The United States has become self-deterred in its international actions since the end of the Cold War. Without a clear "vital" threat, the United States has become reticent to use, or threaten to use, military forces to support its national priorities. Without an active United States leadership role, and with no other country willing to assume the role, the effectiveness of collective or coalition security arrangements has diminished. In the long term, continued United States self-deterrence will encourage the proliferation of arms and weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The United States needs to assume an aggressive long term national security strategy to guide the course of international development. Analyzing deterrence theory and identifying reasons why deterrence fails provide insight as to how the United States can best influence the regional threats caused by ethnic tensions or the ambitions of rogue state leaders. Active engagement now will help prevent the proliferation of WMD.

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Introduction

"Never has American leadership been more essential--to navigate the shoals of the world's new dangers and to capitalize on its opportunities."¹

Taking the lead in the international response to the 1990 Iraq invasion of Kuwait, President Bush hailed the dawn of a "New World Order"--an era envisioning U.S.-Russian cooperation, a more effective United Nations and collective response to acts of aggression against the "Order." This declaration promised a leadership role for the U.S. as it used its power and influence to shape events in the post-Cold War international environment.²

This attempt to establish a U.S. dominant role following the post-Cold War was short lived. As fighting broke out in the former Yugoslavia in June 1991, the U.S. retreated from taking an active leadership role. The dangers were deemed too great and the stakes too low to justify U.S. military involvement in this troubled area. This event marks the point where the U.S. became self-deterred in the international environment and began reassessing its role as the lone remaining superpower.³

¹ A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement (Washington: The White House, February 1995), i.

² U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, The United States and the Use of Force in the Post-Cold War World: Toward Self-Deterrence? Staff Report (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1994), 8-9.

³ Ibid, 9-11.

What interests are so "vital" to the U.S. that it should be prepared to commit Armed Forces to protect them.

Since 1991, the true character of the post-Cold War international security environment has begun to emerge. The last few years have witnessed the eruption of new and diverse challenges to the peaceful coexistence of the world's nations. Regional instabilities, caused by the reemergence of ethnic tensions, or the ambitions of rogue state leaders testing the waters of the new environment, are now the principal threats facing the U.S. and the international community.⁴

Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the potential for third world nations to strike at the United States homeland pose future threats to our national survival. Left unchecked, these dangers threaten the international peace that was promised as the Soviet walls crumbled.

The end of the Cold War also presents opportunities for global cooperation and collective security. Although talk of a "New World Order" has receded, the potential for global collective security still exists. Freed from the shackles of continuous superpower confrontation, nations are choosing to move toward free market economies and democratic governmental institutions. These trends promote global political stability

⁴ A National, i.

and peaceful conflict resolution.⁵

What is the proper role of the U.S. in the international community today? What actions can the U.S. take to increase its national security? How can the U.S. influence the global environment to promote stability?

This paper advocates a more active U.S. role in world events by identifying the long term deleterious effects of continued self-deterrence and, using conventional deterrence theory, recommends a strategy that will enhance future U.S. national security and global collective security.

Deterrence Theory

"In concert with the other elements of US national power, our military capabilities serve to **deter aggression and prevent conflict** by convincing potential adversaries that their objectives will be denied and that their aggression will be decisively defeated."⁶

In understanding deterrence, one must first realize that deterrence operates in the mind of a potential aggressor, or deteree.⁷ When contemplating an aggressive action, the deteree weighs the risks or consequences of committing an act against the rewards expected to be gained. In arriving at his

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ National Military Strategy of the United States of America: A Strategy of Flexible and Selective Engagement (Washington: Joint Chiefs of Staff, February, 1995), iii. [Emphasis in the original.]

⁷ This analysis assumes that the deteree is a rational player that makes decisions logically and in accordance with an established value system.

decision, the deteree evaluates a deterrer's capability and commitment to respond to the aggressive action: Can a deterrer respond and will he choose to do so?⁸ Because a deterrer will not always specify all that he considers important enough to protect, the deteree must gauge the deterrer's commitments. In this environment of "general deterrence," he knows there are actions he could commit that would draw a response; however, he is uncertain as to what they might be.

If a deterrer learns that an aggressive act is contemplated, he may choose to "up the ante" by attempting to further influence the deteree's decision-making process. By taking actions that increase his capability or show additional commitment or resolve, he manipulates the perceived levels of risk or consequence, attempting to persuade the deteree that they exceed expected rewards or the rewards cannot be gained. The highest level of response is to threaten military action to counter aggression. At this point, the interaction takes on the air of a poker game--the deterrer has raised the stakes and the deteree must decide whether the adversary has a good hand or is merely bluffing. In the case of a threatened military response, if a deteree chooses not to be deterred and

⁸ Roger W. Barnett, Global 93: Deterrence Theory for the Coming Decade (Newport: Naval War College, Center for Naval Warfare Studies, 1993), 4-6.

exposes a bluff, the credibility of the deterrer's commitment and resolve in future crises has been severely damaged.

If after this involved interplay, the deteree proceeds with the aggressive act, deterrence fails; if no aggressive action occurs, we presume that deterrence works. However, since deterrence works in the mind of the deteree, we are not sure whether deterrer actions actually influenced the decision--successful deterrence cannot be measured.⁹

Flexible Deterrent Options

"FDOs using military forces and resources should be combined with diplomatic, political and economic actions by non-DOD agencies to demonstrate to a potential adversary a clear signal of US resolve."¹⁰

The additional steps the United States may execute to effect deterrence in a crisis situation are termed flexible deterrent options (FDOs). FDOs are predetermined military, diplomatic, political and economic actions that the United States may execute to show capability, commitment and resolve to a potential aggressor. Upgrading alert status or employing ready in place assets as a show of force are examples of military actions. Diplomatic actions include restricting activities of diplomats or preparing to withdraw embassy

⁹ Ibid, 7-8.

¹⁰ Instructional Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan CY 93-95 IJSCP (Washington: Joint Chiefs of Staff, August 25, 1992), III-4.

personnel. Political options include maintaining an open dialogue with the press or gaining Congressional support. Economically, the U.S. may freeze monetary assets or enact trade sanctions. So they may be effective against specific states, unified commanders are tasked to evaluate the culture, mind set, and intentions of a prospective deteree to formulate FDOs that will have the greatest likelihood of deterring and defusing a situation. These instruments of national power allow the National Command Authority to rapidly respond with measures tailored to exact deterrence.¹¹ To be effective, FDOs must be readily apparent to a deteree. Roger Barnett explains:

"...., communication of the deterrent arrangement is an important element of deterrence theory. An unarticulated warning is irrelevant. A message sent and not received is worthless. Communication involves not only clarity and reliability of transmission, but also interpretation of the message in the way that was intended. **None** of these can be ensured."¹²

Why Deterrence Fails

"The fact that leaders have hazarded the well-being and, sometimes, the continued existence of their nation when sufficient motivation was present must be considered of utmost concern."¹³

Since deterrence successes cannot be measured, one may look

¹¹ Ibid, III-2-III-6.

¹² Barnett, Global 93, 6. [Emphasis in the original.]

¹³ Barry Wolf, When the Weak Attack the Strong: Failures of Deterrence (Santa Monica: RAND, 1991), 5.

to the dynamics of recognized deterrence failures to draw conclusions on how deterrence works. Historical evaluation of deterrence failures reveals three primary reasons for failure:¹⁴

1. **The weaker state was highly motivated.** The high motivation may be due in whole or part to a strong commitment to particular values, a psychopathological leader, or a "crazy state"¹⁵ mentality.
2. **The weaker state misperceived some facet of the situation.** Misperceptions have included instances where the weaker state (1) perceived a vulnerability that did not exist, (2) expected no retaliation from the strong state, or (3) believed allies would come to its aid.
3. **The stronger state was vulnerable.** Such vulnerability may occur in the context of large-scale or low-intensity conflicts.¹⁶

These reasons for deterrence failure shed insight into the decision-making processes of potential deterees. What factor in the deterrence arrangement failed? Analysis suggests that a deterrer may have less influence in instances where the target of deterrence policy is a psychopathic leader or is motivated by factors that the deteree cannot comprehend. In these cases the risks or consequences that should be weighed before arriving at a decision may not be considered by the

¹⁴ This source identifies why weaker states threaten or attack stronger ones. Since this analysis looks at U.S. response to aggression, extended deterrence brings the U.S. into play as the stronger state.

¹⁵ The term "crazy state" is used to describe cultures whose cost-benefit analysis in determining courses of action is difficult to understand by Western standards.

¹⁶ Wolf, 5. [Emphasis in the original.]

deteree--the situation is dominated by aggressor intentions.¹⁷

In the second case of deterrence failure, the deteree misinterpreted some aspect of the deterrence arrangement. He incorrectly deduced a deteree vulnerability that did not exist, believed the deteree would not respond to the aggression or believed his allies would prevent a deterrer response. The deteree did not receive the intended message.

The third case of deterrence failure involves cases where an aggressor may be able to exploit a deterrer vulnerability. Although this failure can occur in the context of an all out attack, it is most often seen in the scope of limited conflict where the aggressor is attempting to probe or undermine deterrer commitment. For example, terrorist attacks which have relatively low military value are executed for political gain.¹⁸ Effective military response to such actions is often not feasible.

Examining historical reasons why deterrence fails are valuable because it forces deterrence planners to evaluate the motives and decision-making processes of their intended deterees. By recognizing failures, leaders can formulate effective options that show a deteree capability, commitment, and resolve. A deterrence strategy integrated with a nation's

¹⁷ Ibid, 7.

¹⁸ Wolf, 13-14.

security policy enhances credibility.

Deterrence Applied to Today's Threats

"...for the prospective deterrer two requirements arise: (1) communicating a deterrent message so that the prospective deteree does, in fact, take notice, and (2) relating to the deteree's value structure--that is, finding a way to encourage him to appreciate the relevance of the deterrent action."¹⁹

Remembering the three reasons why deterrence fails--high motivation, misperceptions, or military vulnerabilities--the potential for a deterrence strategy may be maximized by evaluating which deterrence failure category a deterrence arrangement would fall into if it were to fail. Although most deterrent arrangements cannot be simply pigeonholed, strategy based on careful analysis will be more likely to achieve success.

Conflict caused by ethnic tension. Importantly, in the case of a deteree being driven by high motivation where any deterrence strategy may prove ineffective, implementation of FDOs threatening military action must be backed up with proper military action. This suggests that if a deterrer is not prepared to commit military forces, his options should be limited to diplomatic, political and economic actions without the threat of military force. Threatened, but not executed, military action would undermine future deterrence because

¹⁹ Barnett, Global 93, 19.

deterrent commitment, resolve and credibility would be compromised.

Conflict caused by rogue state leaders. Although there are certainly exceptions, failures to deter rogue state leaders are usually associated with their misperceptions of a situation. Sound deterrence strategy requires the deterrence arrangement be made clear to them--hostile aggression will not meet with success. These leaders will often probe the deterrence arrangement in search of vulnerabilities to exploit. Additionally, their possession of WMD would be problematic because it would provide a military superiority that could be leveraged in a region.

Proliferation of WMD. The purpose of preventing the proliferation of WMD is to avoid the future deterrence problems that their possession entails. Nations possessing WMD in the future could belong to any three of the deterrence failure categories. Most dangerous would be WMD in the hands of psychopathological leaders who would not factor the consequences of their use. The following two sections addressing U.S. self-deterrence and its dangers have profound implications on the proliferation of WMD.

Toward Self-Deterrence

"...since mid-1991, the United States has become increasingly self-deterred, or self-restrained, reticent to use and consequently unable to threaten credibly the use of military

force to support its foreign policy objectives."²⁰

The 1991 Gulf War has been described as a watershed event in the interaction of nations. Although a victory for collective security response, subsequent evaluation of the coalition shows how fragile the arrangement was. Despite a case of undisputed Iraqi aggression and a significant threat to the world's oil supply, many credit the untiring efforts of President Bush with building the coalition and holding it together. Even support within the U.S. was tenuous with Congress approving offensive operations only weeks before the U.N. deadline. Any last minute concessions from Saddam Hussein would have certainly forestalled the offensive and prompted coalition members to pursue a negotiated diplomatic solution. The Gulf War circumstances were unique--Saddam Hussein's obstinacy was the greatest contributor to coalition success.²¹

On December 9, 1992, U.S. military personnel arrived in Somalia to participate as part of a multinational force to support humanitarian relief efforts in Somalia. During the months that followed, U.S. and U.N. troops found themselves increasingly involved in competitions between competing warlords. On October 3, 18 U.S. soldiers were killed while attempting to capture one of the warlord's lieutenants. The

²⁰ U.S. Congress, 1.

²¹ Ibid, 8.

humanitarian relief effort the U.S. signed on to had evolved into participation in operations between fighting factions. Although President Clinton responded by sending additional forces to protect the U.S. commitment, it was clear that the humanitarian relief effort had evolved into something more dangerous. In response to domestic pressure concerning the U.S. role in Somalia, the President set a timetable for the departure of all U.S. forces by March 31, 1994. As Kofi Annan, U.N. Under Secretary General in charge of peacekeeping, observed, "the impression has been created that the easiest way to disrupt a peacekeeping operation is to kill Americans."²²

During the Cold War, the U.S. and its Western allies rallied together to face the Soviet menace. In this regard, the Soviet Union made an excellent enemy--a nation whose hostile government possessed a significant military and nuclear capability, and professed an ideological goal of crushing the West. With this credible threat to the very existence of our nation, U.S. national policy embraced communist containment and justified sending forces around the globe to protect our interests.²³

Today there is not the clear threat that pervaded the Cold

²² Ibid, 12-13.

²³ Ibid, 3.

War era. The U.S. does not see significant dangers to national security posed by the regional threats identified in President Clinton's security strategy. For this reason, the U.S. is becoming "self-deterred" in using military force to support foreign policy objectives.

Long Term Dangers of Self Deterrence

"U.S. self-deterrence, ..., appears to have begun to erode the ability of the international system to respond effectively to threats to the peace that might usefully be controlled or reversed by the threat to use, or actual use of, military force."²⁴

The coalition that countered the aggression of Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War could not have been formed, nor maintained, without the active leadership of the U.S. Today, however, U.S. leadership and commitment are coming into question. Other nations see the uncertainty that underlies the U.S. attempt to define its post-Cold War priorities. As the U.S. moves toward self-deterrence, international cooperation becomes less effective. No other country is willing to take the lead in forming coalitions in response to localized aggression. The deterrent signal that potential aggressors perceive in this environment is that hostile acts may meet with success. The net effect is that the post-Cold War world will move toward disorder and chaos.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid, 33.

²⁵ Ibid, 30-31.

A world order built on U.S. self-deterrence would provide incentives for ambitious leaders to increase their influence. No longer deterred from pursuing their ambitions, rogue leaders would be tempted to accumulate arms--including weapons of mass destruction--in order to gain local military superiority.²⁶

Future Opportunities

"At present, U.S. policy on [actual or threatened intervention] claims a willingness to take action when U.S. national interests are jeopardized, but the policy exhibits little further definition. A policy so vague that it hinges solely on U.S. interpretation of its national interests at any particular time has low deterrent value, and does little to permit allies to predict or anticipate U.S. actions."²⁷

The historic opportunity that the break up of the Soviet Union presents the U.S. must not be squandered. Self-deterrence must be rejected or its future consequences will one day haunt our nation as an opportunity lost. Although U.S. forces should not be readied for commitment in all situations, a more aggressive long term national security policy, one that includes a leadership role for the U.S., is required. If the threats that are not considered "vital" to our interests are addressed with a coherent strategy today, potential future threats that could challenge our national

²⁶ Ibid, 33

²⁷ Roger W. Barnett, "Seapower Litorally," American Defense Annual, 9th ed. (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1994), 118.

well being may be avoided.

Before the U.S. can assume its proper role in the post-Cold War world, we must reevaluate the values, interests and priorities that we hold dear and desire to advance. This reevaluation should look at the long term and emphasize the threat posed by proliferation of WMD. Nonproliferation should become the basis for a new "doctrine." With a strong U.S. stance and the promise of U.S. leadership, historic allies will find a resolute, dependable partner in the U.S. and the early effects of self-deterrence will be reversed.

Although the U.S. should not list all instances in which it would be prepared to commit military force, those instances that are clear cut should be distinctly enunciated, especially to those threats that would be deterred through a strong statement of U.S. commitment. In those instances that would not merit U.S. military involvement, especially those deemed less receptive to deterrence, the U.S. should not threaten military action. Influence in this case should be limited to economic, political and diplomatic means.

Greater emphasis should be placed on the development of FDOs emphasizing coordination between the military and other branches of government. Government and civilian experts would analyze the culture, mind set and decision-making processes of a nation's leadership to devise FDOs specifically tailored to

ensure deterrence. In a crisis situation, predetermined FDOs will assist the National Command Authority (NCA) in taking actions that would be counterproductive due to a lack of understanding of the prospective deteree. When necessary, and especially when forecast to be effective, FDOs should be executed early when tensions are mounting.

The U.S. should continue backing the efforts of the United Nations in addressing regional conflicts caused by ethnic tensions. As previous analysis shows, these situations are the least responsive to deterrence and efforts to manage them with a military commitment may damage U.S. credibility. The U.S. should bring economic, political, and diplomatic pressure to bare, but should not threaten (or promise) military forces unless it is ready to deliver.

Currently the U.S. is involved in NATO Peace Enforcement operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This decision was made after more than four years of U.S. soul searching over its rightful role in this troubled area. The success of this mission could have a profound impact on the path of U.S. policy and the effect of U.S. policy for years to come. However, if the U.S. is going to have an active role in its future national security and the world's collective security, it must be prepared to take a leadership role in addressing the dangers present today.

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